



RSVP Connections

Connecting Senior Volunteers with Community Needs
December 2003

Dear RSVP Volunteers,

The holidays are here! There is so much to do: shopping, baking, decorating, and visiting friends and family. But underlying all the busy preparations and festivities, there is that wonderful holiday spirit. We pause to reflect on the quiet wonder of a starry night, watch the glow of the candle, or listen to a choir sing the beloved holiday songs. We are filled with a sense of beauty and joy, hopes for peace on earth, and compassion and concern for those in need.

That spirit is found every day in the work done by our RSVP volunteers. Whether it is helping a child learn to read, bringing a hot meal to a shut-in, or sewing blankets for nursing home residents, volunteers reach out to make the world a more loving, more gentle, more caring place for those they serve.

This issue of the RSVP newsletter features some volunteer sites that serve our neighbors who are most in need. A quotation from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* captures the spirit of the work done through these sites. A philanthropic man, who approaches the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge for a donation to benefit the poor of London, explains the reason for his concern:

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time... We choose this time, because it is a time of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices."

Throughout the year, RSVP volunteers are helping to make sure that families in need have enough to eat and warm clothing to wear. They transport thousands of pounds of surplus food to agencies that serve the needy. They sort donated clothing and household items so that these can be made available to families who otherwise could not afford them. They make up bags of food that will provide a week's worth of nourishing meals for families experiencing unemployment and poverty.

To all our RSVP volunteers, who give so much of themselves to others throughout the year, the RSVP staff sends our warmest wishes for health and happiness during the holiday season and the New Year!

Patricia Dowling
RSVP Director



Inside this issue...Spotlight on Food Shuttle of WNY, Lovejoy Caregivers, Response to Love, St. Vincent DePaul Society, Operation Good Neighbor, and **much, much more...**

SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED...

IN THE CITY OF BUFFALO

RESPONSE TO LOVE:

Three mornings a week, starting at 6:15 am, RSVP volunteer Fran Zalewski works her magic in the kitchen at the Response to Love Center. Later that morning, she will have prepared enough hot, homemade meals to serve 150-300 guests who come for lunch at the Center. Other volunteers speak of Fran's cooking prowess with respect. One volunteer explained, "Fran makes everything from scratch. She can take a plain chicken and turn it into something really special."

The volunteers at Response to Love come for one reason: they wish to help others who are in need. Response to Love is located on the East Side of Buffalo in a building that previously housed St. Adalbert's School. The surrounding neighborhood is a place where many families face daily struggles related to poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and other concerns. Response to Love is a haven for the needy in the area. Underlying all the work done by the volunteers for the neighborhood are the values of self-worth, dignity, and respect.

The Center is run by four Felician Sisters from St. Adalbert's Convent. There is no paid staff. Volunteers donate their time to run the various programs at the Center including a daily food kitchen, a monthly food pantry, holiday meals for the needy, a thrift shop, and temporary shelter and food for the homeless. Last year, Response to Love Center served more than 27,000 people in the food kitchen. On Thanksgiving, the Center prepares enough turkeys to serve full dinners to more than 500 people. The Center also links people in need with agencies that can provide job training, counseling, health insurance, drug rehabilitation, advocacy for veterans, and other services.

The guiding light of Response to Love is Sr. Johnice Rzadkiewicz (who now is an RSVP volunteer too!). Sr. Johnice's energy goes in many directions, from writing grants and finding donations of food and clothing, to inspiring new volunteers to join in the work, to reaching out to a young mother in the neighborhood who had no warm clothing or adequate shelter for herself and her baby.

I recently visited Response to Love and spoke with several RSVP volunteers about their service. Pat Kowalski provided a warm reception at the front desk for walk-in guests and incoming telephone calls. Esther Luke assisted people with applications for the toys to be distributed by the News Neediest Fund. Her husband, Casey Luke, and another volunteer, Art Tomczak, helped Fran Zalewski to clean up the kitchen after serving lunch for 211 guests. Sr. Rose Szymanski and Sr. Catherine Raczkowski assisted customers in the thrift shop with purchases of clothing, household items, and even holiday decorations.

Esther and Casey Luke started volunteering at Response to Love in 1991 after Sr. Johnice ex-



Fran and guest at Response to Love

tended a personal invitation to them to join in the work. “There is so much faith here,” said Esther. The volunteers feel that they are enriched by the experience of assisting those in need. They gain in compassion. They come to a better understanding of poverty. They learn more about people from other cultural and ethnic groups.

As I was leaving the kitchen, one of the guests brought Fran his empty plate. “Thanks, Fran. That was delicious.” She smiled and said, “That’s what makes me feel really good.”

THE LOVEJOY CAREGIVERS INTERFAITH MINISTRY

The Lovejoy Caregivers Interfaith Ministry (TLC) is a good example of how agencies in a neighborhood can work together to help out its neediest residents. A Catholic Charities sponsored program, Lovejoy Caregivers brings together resources from seven churches, and local schools in the East Lovejoy area to provide regular food distribution in an area where poverty rates are as high as 50%.

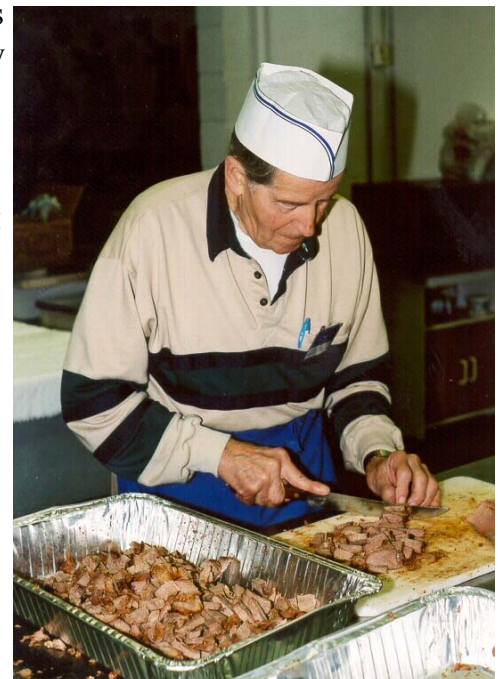
The Lovejoy Caregivers’ food pantry is located in the basement of the rectory of St. Agnes Church. Sr. Rose Therese DiGregorio, a Franciscan sister of Williamsville, is the Director of TLC. Sr. Rose Therese showed me the neat, well-stocked shelves of canned goods and other non-perishable items, and the cooler and freezers where meat and other items are kept. Emergency food is also kept in the rectories of local churches in the area.

The pantry is open three days per week. Volunteers help recipients to bag and distribute the food items. Volunteers also deliver food to senior citizens and people with disabilities. During the times that they are not actively working with clients, volunteers help to stock and organize the shelves, or clean the pantry areas. Volunteers also assist with bread distribution that is held at neighboring Trinity UCC two days per month. In addition to providing food, Sr. Rose Therese helps to link visitors to other needed services.

Sr. Rose Therese emphasized that she has strict qualifications for volunteers: They must be dedicated to serving the poor. They must approach people with love, compassion, and understanding. They must be able to maintain confidentiality about the people who are served and the reasons that have brought them to the food pantry. Sr. Rose Therese puts a high priority on maintaining the dignity of those that are served. Every summer, the Lovejoy Caregivers hosts an outdoor celebration for anyone connected with the agency. The picnic has great food, live music, door prizes, and fills the large parking lot of St. Agnes Church. “No one knows who is a volunteer and who is a recipient,” she said. “Everyone is together.”

ST.VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

It is 10:30 am on a Sunday morning. Outside the St. Vincent de Paul Society’s building at Main and Bryant in Buffalo, men, women, and a few children, stand in an orderly line. Inside the building, volunteers have been completing preparations for a hot, nourishing lunchtime meal since 8:00 am. Jack Regan, the dining



Danny Cahill helps prepare a savory stew at St. Vincent DePaul Society

room manager, oversees the activity as volunteers complete their assigned tasks. One group is at the loading dock area, sorting through produce brought in by Food Shuttle volunteers. Another group is in the kitchen, cutting up beef, potatoes, and carrots for a huge pot of beef stew. Others prepare the coffee, juice, desserts, and the bags of bread and doughnuts which be given to each dining room guest.

Before the dining room is opened, the volunteers gather for a moment of prayer. Their work in feeding the poor is a continuation of the work of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic priest who ministered to the poorest of the poor in Paris. The St. Vincent de Paul Society in Buffalo has been caring for the poor and marginalized since 1847. The dining room serves a hot lunch 5 days a week, and has the capacity to serve 500 meals per day. The Society also operates a thrift store where donated clothing, toys, furniture, appliances and other household goods are sold. Both the dining room and the store are staffed by volunteers and stocked with donations. As winter approaches, the volunteers will collect coats and toys, and distribute these to needy families and individuals.

RSVP volunteers Casey Wilbert and Daniel Cahill have been volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul Society since 1981, when the dining room was located in the school basement of Our Lady of Lourdes. Since their arrival at 8 am this morning, they have sliced over 230 pieces of cake, and cut up the meat for the stew. Later, Danny will assume his role as greeter, pouring coffee or juice for the guests as they enter the dining room. Casey's work will start again after the meal: he takes on the task of washing out the large pots and pans.

I asked the two men about what keeps them volunteering at the dining room. Casey replied that he gets satisfaction from knowing that he is helping out someone else. "I've been pretty fortunate," he explained, "I want to give something back." Danny immediately replied, "Meeting the people. I'm a 'people person', and over the years, I've gotten to know a lot of the volunteers and the people who come here to eat."

The St. Vincent de Paul Society dining room will need additional volunteers on Saturdays and Sundays during summer.

Volunteers assist in the thrift store and warehouse, where they sort and hang donated clothing, and make minor repairs to household items. Volunteers also can assist with clerical tasks in the main office. For more information on volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul Society, call the RSVP office at 858-7548



St. Vincent DePaul volunteer Casey Wilbert welcomes new additions to the pantry

TRIBUTE DAY 2004.... Mark your calendar and plan to attend the RSVP recognition luncheon on **Friday, October 1, 2004**. Volunteers with at least 20 hours of service during the period July 2003 – June 2004 will be invited to this annual gala event.

SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED...

IN THE SOUTHTOWNS

OPERATION GOOD NEIGHBOR

Many of us remember reading with disbelief the announcement in 1983 that Bethlehem Steel Corporation was closing much of its Lackawanna operation. Lackawanna, Buffalo, and surrounding towns and villages were shaken by the sudden surge in unemployment. Families of those employed by the steel mill, often across two or three generations, had depended on the steel plant's good paying jobs. As the area continued to lose industries and businesses, many were unable to find comparable wages, and found themselves unemployed or underemployed for months or even years. Since the closing of Bethlehem Steel, some of the smaller, rural communities continue to experience higher than average levels of poverty.

Operation Good Neighbor was initiated by the Lake Shore Association of Christian Churches in 1983 in response to the increased number of families in the Southtowns who were coping with unemployment and resulting loss of income. Operation Good Neighbor provides assistance through a food pantry and a thrift shop at a site in North Evans and another in Angola. Food for the pantry is obtained through the Food Bank, Food Shuttle, and local churches. The churches also donate food, clothing, and household items for the thrift store, as well as manpower for the daily needs of Operation Good Neighbor. The agency has been

awarded five federal grants to support their work in the community.

Operation Good Neighbor has no paid staff. All tasks, from stocking food to maintaining the building to writing grants, is accomplished through the work of volunteers. RSVP Volunteer, Bill Roberts, serves as the director of Operation Good Neighbor. At the North Evans site, Bill pointed out a loading ramp that has been installed recently by a team of volunteers to bring donated food more easily into the church cellar where the food pantry is located. Upstairs, volunteers sort donated clothing and arrange shelves in the thrift shop. An assembly line of volunteers downstairs puts together bags of food items for the families that will arrive later that day. Volunteers also deliver bags of food to homebound individuals in the area. On average, Operation Good Neighbor provides 150 boxes/bags of food per week for families and individuals in eight surrounding communities. In recognition of this dedicated team of volunteers and the network of churches that support the good work, Operation Good Neighbor received the first "Agency of the Year" award from the Food Bank of WNY.

Operation Good Neighbor's food pantries in North Evans and Angola are open on Tuesday, and the thrift shop in North Evans is also open on Friday.

If you are cleaning out "stuff", please consider helping RSVP to meet the following needs:

Fabrics and yarns – our sewing groups can turn your extra fabric and yarn into laprobes for nursing home patients, mittens and hats for needy children, or other items.

Pots and pans, coats – the thrift stores operated by Response to Love, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and Operation Good Neighbor find that these items are among the most needed by their customers.

Calendars: If you have more calendars than you need by the time the New Year starts, send these to the RSVP office. We'll bring them to the St. Vincent de Paul Society for distribution.





THE FOOD SHUTTLE of WESTERN NEW YORK

PROBLEM: In our community, there are people who go hungry, while in other places, good excess food is being thrown out.

SOLUTION: The Food Shuttle.

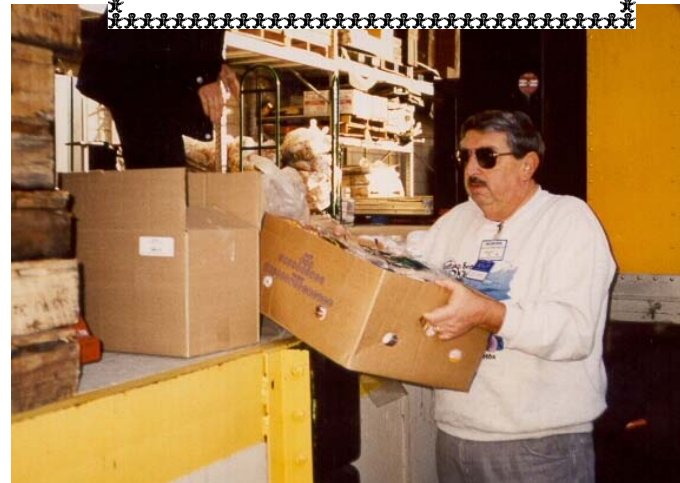
The mission of the Food Shuttle is simple—to help alleviate hunger in the community by transporting surplus prepared and perishable food from supermarkets, bakeries, restaurants, and other food-related businesses to soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters throughout the Buffalo area. Volunteers pick up food in their own vehicles, and transport it to soup kitchens, food pantries, Head Start programs, halfway houses, low income senior citizen housing centers, and homeless shelters, as well as shelters for AIDS patients and at-risk or homeless teens.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, RSVP volunteers John and Melody Tronolone start their route at the Wegman's store on Essjay Road in Williamsville. They pull up to the loading dock, which is filled a few minutes later with boxes of produce, bags of bread and doughnuts, and even a few bags of clothing donated by Wegman's employees. Employees who bring out the pallets of food spend a few minutes conversing with the volunteers. "They are a very cooperative store," said John. "They make sure that they save whatever food they can for us, rather than immediately throwing it out." The Tronolones, along with another Food Shuttle volunteer, load a car and a van full of bags and boxes, and then go to the next destination: a food pantry on Pratt Street operated through the Zion Dominion Church in Buffalo. The Food Shuttle volunteers and food pantry workers bring the groceries into the pantry. Later that morning, the food will be distributed to about 35 needy families in the neighborhood.

The Tronolones emphasize that the Food Shuttle is a three-way partnership between the volunteer drivers, the Providers, and the Recipient agencies. "We started with the Food Shuttle in 1990, a year after it started," said Melody. "It's a very rewarding volunteer experience, because it helps so many people." John agreed, and added, "It makes sense for food to reach those who need it rather than being thrown into a dumpster."

The Food Shuttle always welcomes new volunteer drivers. Time is flexible and is selected by each volunteer. The route takes about one to two hours to complete. In fact, the Tronolones are able to complete their Food Shuttle route in the morning, and then deliver a route for Amherst Meals on Wheels before noon. For more information on becoming a Food Shuttle volunteer, call the RSVP office at 858-7548.

- An all-volunteer organization with 400 volunteers
- Pick up from 150 Providers and deliver to 125 Recipient Agencies 7 days/week
- Over 300 Pickups weekly, averaging 50,000 pounds of food each week, totaling 15,000 tons of food per year.



John picks up donated food from Wegmans



Donations are sorted at the pantry

WELCOME NEW RSVP VOLUNTEERS...WE'RE GLAD YOU JOINED US

BAPST, KENNETH M.	BUFFALO GENERAL HOSPITAL
BARAGER, CAROL A.	MERCY HOSPITAL
BASKEY, ALICE T.	WEST SENECA WEST MIDDLE SCHOOL
BROWN, NANCY L.	HAMBURG-UNION PLEASANT SCHOOL
CLARE, JUDITH N.	ROSWELL
CZUBAJ, PATRICIA R.	ERIE COUNTY HOME
DAVIS, SHARON F.	BUFFALO ZOO
FEUZ, ALFRED C.	RURAL TRANSIT
GEIDEL, ANNA M.	OPERATION GOOD NEIGHBOR
GOULD, MARIE A.	MERCY HOSPITAL
GRAZIANO, CAROL G.	GARDEN GATE
HENRY, DOROTHY R.	WINCHESTER
HENRY, MICHAEL J.	MEALS ON WHEELS OF BFLO. & E.C.
JACKSON, MERNA E.	LUTHERAN CHURCH HOME
JONES, BETTY	LUTHERAN CHURCH HOME
LEININGER, MID L.	ROSWELL
LEWIS, MARY ELLEN	SOUTHTOWNS MOW - SARDINIA
MANNO, CHARLES L.	VA HOSPITAL
MILLAR, LOWELL T.	SOUTHTOWNS MOW—SARDINIA
PIRRUNG, THERESSE M.	ST VINCENT De PAUL SOCIETY
RUSKE, SHIRLEY A.	FOREST ELEMENTARY
SABATINO, EDMUND A.	VA HOSPITAL
SAWYER, BEVERLY A.	MERCY HOSPITAL
SCHILLING, JOANN E.	AUTUMNWOOD
SCHROEDER, SUSAN C.	JOURNEY'S END
SCHWING, MARTHA Y.	BEAVER MEADOW
SIELSKI, JUDITH A.	BUFFALO ZOO
STEVENS, ARTHUR E.	RURAL TRANSIT - HOLLAND/SARDINIA
STRIEGEL, JOYCE V.	MEALS ON WHEELS OF BFLO. & E.C.
SZABLEWSKI, DOROTHY M.	LUTHERAN CHURCH HOME
WHALEN, HAZEL	UNION EAST ELEMENTARY
WIERTEL, WALTER J.	B&EC NAVAL & MILITARY PARK
ZIMMERMAN, DAVID C.	BUFFALO MUSEUM OF SCIENCE

Erie County Department of Senior Services can help—Call 858-8526.

Information about many programs and services are available on the web at

www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices

RSVP RESPONDS...

Our volunteers are our best recruiters! Pass along this newsletter to anyone who you think would be a terrific volunteer. We are especially trying to find volunteers to help out the following agencies:

Children's Hospital –assist at the front information desk. Volunteers also are needed in the play-rooms to play games, read, or color with the young patients.

The **Erie County Dept. of Mental Health** –assist with clerical tasks in the Rath Building office.

Lorraine Academy (near Mercy Hospital in Buffalo)- help out in kindergarten classes with activities as assigned by the classroom teacher.

Mt. Olive Afterschool Program (near Grider and Delavan)–homework helpers for children who attend afterschool; kitchen assistants to prepare nutritious snacks; clerical assistance in offices.

Meals on Wheels of Buffalo & Erie County – to deliver meals throughout the City of Buffalo.

Sickle Cell Anemia Association (near Kensington and Bailey) assist with data entry and other light clerical tasks.

Cantalian Center (located off Hertel Avenue): work skills mentors for developmentally disabled adults employed in a sheltered workshop setting.

Volunteer drivers needed: If you enjoy being on the go, the following agencies need drivers:

Veterans Administration DAV Transport Program- transport veterans to the VA

American Cancer Society Road to Recovery Program-transport cancer patients to chemotherapy or radiation therapy appointments.

In the near future, RSVP also will be seeking volunteer drivers for a program to transport developmentally disabled adults to recreational activities.

If you are one of the many “snowbirds” who spend winter in a warmer climate, please contact the RSVP office at 858-7548 (and your volunteer site) to let us know how long you will be away.

Tax season is coming... Child & Family Services' Ways to Work/ Family Loan Program needs volunteers to assist their clients with tax returns. Volunteers will receive two full-day sessions of free training from the IRS. Volunteers will provide tax assistance at the program's office on Delaware Avenue and at several area senior centers.

Happy New Year!!

RSVP of Erie County
Dept. of Senior Services
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Buffalo, NY 14202